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Predictors of Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence: The Role of Gender Beliefs and Authenticity

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Abstract: Gender-based violence represents one of the most serious forms of violation of women's human rights, deeply rooted in gender stereotypes and patriarchal patterns. The aim of this study was to examine the relationships between gender beliefs, authenticity in romantic relationships, and attitudes towards domestic violence against women. The research was conducted on a sample of 201 participants through an online platform. The variables were operationalized using the Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale, the Gender Equality Attitudes Scale and the Serbian adaptation of the Authenticity in Relationships Scale – AIRS-22. The results indicate strong and consistent gender differences: on average, men express greater tolerance towards violence compared to women, while women show stronger support for egalitarian gender roles across all domains. The most stable predictor of attitudes towards the justification of partner violence was egalitarianism in the educational role, pointing to the importance of the educational system as a key space for socialization and value transmission. Furthermore, participants from rural areas displayed greater tolerance towards violence and more traditional attitudes about gender roles compared to participants from urban areas. Contrary to expectations, authenticity in romantic relationships did not make a significant contribution in predicting attitudes towards violence, suggesting that global attitudes are predominantly shaped by cultural and social norms rather than individual characteristics. These findings have important implications for the development of preventive and educational programs that emphasize the strengthening of egalitarian values in educational contexts and society as a whole, with particular attention to differences between urban and rural settings.

Keywords: *gender-based violence, justification of violence, gender roles, authenticity, romantic relationships.*

Introduction

Gender-based violence is among the most widespread forms of violation of women's human rights. Its roots lie in historical discrimination, customs, and traditional power structures, where male dominance obtains institutional and cultural legitimacy (Perrin et al., 2022; Watts and Zimmerman, 2022). According to the Istanbul Convention, gender-based violence is that which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or disproportionately affects women, and it encompasses a wide spectrum of phenomena: from domestic violence, sexual harassment, forced marriages, to violations of human rights in armed conflict settings (Council of Europe, 2011; European Commission, 2024). Especially concerning is the presence of violent practices in everyday life, as well as their new face in the digital sphere, where the internet and social networks become arenas for novel forms of control, surveillance, and harassment of women(Wattson, 2021).

According to the UN (CEDAW, 1992), any act of violence based on sex that leads to physical, psychological, or sexual suffering of a woman, including threats of such acts, is a violation of her fundamental rights. Gender-based violence does not remain confined to the private sphere, it also includes institutional neglect, human trafficking, and structural violence manifested through unequal access to resources and decision making (Krug et al., 2002). Violence against women is a serious social and public health issue in Serbia. According to Interior Ministry data, in 2023 some 28,413 domestic violence cases were registered, with victims in over 70 %

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of cases being women (Autonomous Women's Center, 2023). Femicide presents a tragic dimension: between 2011 and 2023, 406 women and girls were killed in family-partner settings (Autonomous Women's Center, 2023).

Gender beliefs, as well as the ways partner relationships are constructed and maintained, play a central role in understanding and justifying domestic violence, particularly when aimed at women (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Modern societies, despite formal equality, continue to reproduce patriarchal patterns through institutions, media, and interpersonal relations. Santoniccolo et al. (2023) argue that media representations perpetuate stereotypes, objectification, and sexualization, reinforcing belief in patriarchal gender roles and tolerance toward gender injustice. In that context, socially accepted norms and roles may become a basis for tolerating or even justifying violence. Historically, women's subordination was often justified by appeal to biological differences, attributing women the exclusive role of mother and homemaker, while men retained social power and mobility. These roles are not merely socially imposed but deeply embedded in personal and partner relations, contributing to the normalization of violence as a means of control (Indora, 2022).

For these reasons, understanding and deconstructing gender stereotypes, as well as promoting authenticity and equality in partner relationships, are essential steps in violence prevention and in building a society in which all individuals have equal opportunity for a life of dignity without fear. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate how gender beliefs and the experience of authenticity in partner relationships affect the tendency to justify domestic violence against women.

Gender roles and partner relationships

Gender roles are a multidimensional concept and may refer to a wide spectrum of characteristics, from attitudes and behaviors related to gender roles to personality traits associated with gender (Hentschel et al., 2019). According to the *Dictionary of Gender Equality*, a gender role is "a set of community expectations related to the behavior of individuals in relation to their sex. These are implicit, unquestioned rules that we adopt through upbringing in the family, at all levels of education, through media, cultural content, and within scientific research" (Jarić and Radović, 2010).

Attitudes toward gender roles, ranging from traditional to egalitarian, significantly influence the dynamics of family relationships (Marks and Dollahite, 2009). Traditionalism implies a clear division of roles: the man as provider and authority figure, the woman as caregiver and homemaker (Kokorić et al., 2013; Radcliffe, 2023). In contrast, egalitarian models emphasize equality in decision-making, financial responsibility, and childcare (Knight and Brinton, 2017).Differences in gender roles can be observed in various social contexts: access to education, political power, economic resources, and social representation (Zlatanović, 2022). Women are often assigned less prestigious jobs, face limited access to resources, and in the family setting, responsibilities and obligations are distributed unequally (Marks and Dollahite, 2009). Such distribution not only affects satisfaction within the family but may also contribute to the normalization of inequality and tolerance of violence (Knight and Brinton, 2017).

Partner relationships unfold within a context of deeply ingrained gender expectations. Although the concept of partnership is increasingly free from institutional restrictions, traditional roles still influence how individuals perceive and shape their relationships. According to Antović (2016), intimate partner relationships require adaptation, emotional exchange, and conflict resolution skills. However, when partnership is based on rigid gender roles, conflicts may arise regarding the distribution of power, expectations, and responsibilities (Amato, 2010). Traditional views of male dominance and female submissiveness may reduce women's sense of authenticity and autonomy, thereby increasing the risk of tolerating violence (Yodanis, 2004).

In practice, gender inequality is often institutionalized and manifests itself through various social, economic, and political mechanisms. Legal frameworks, such as the CEDAW Convention (CEDAW Committee, 1992) and the Gender Equality Act (Republic of Serbia, 2009), define discrimination as any act that undermines or interferes with women's enjoyment of fundamental rights on the basis of sex. Nevertheless, legal measures are often insufficient if deeply rooted cultural patterns and gender stereotypes remain unchanged (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence represents the most drastic manifestation of gender inequality. It encompasses different forms of violenc: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic directed against individu-

als because of their sex, gender, or sexual orientation (United Nations General Assembly, 1993; Council of Europe, 2011). Women and girls are most often victims of such violence, which is a direct consequence of their subordinate position in patriarchal society (WHO, 2013; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002). A specific form is intimate partner violence, characterized not only by cohabitation but also by the intimate relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. In addition to physical and sexual forms, psychological and economic violence also have profound consequences, although they are often less visible. Such forms of violence may include financial control, isolation, threats, manipulation, and denial of basic resources (EIGE, 2022). Violence rarely exists in isolation; multiple forms often overlap simultaneously, which further complicates recognition and intervention (WHO, 2013).

Intimate partner violence often occurs within a pattern that has its internal logic and predictability. It is most often described through the so-called "Cycle of Abuse," which includes three phases: the phase of tension building, the phase of violence escalation, and the phase of remorse and reconciliation (Ignjatović, 2011). This cycle contributes to the victim's continuous entrapment in a violent relationship, as hope for change arises after each violent incident, accompanied by apologies and short-term stabilization.

Typologies of perpetrators of intimate partner violence indicate that violent behavior is not homogeneous. Three dominant types are distinguished: the self-controlled, the impulsive-cyclical, and the instrumental-antisocial (Despotović, 2017; Kelly and Johnson, 2008). The first type is emotionally inhibited and dependent on the partner, the second type is characterized by instability, jealousy, and emotional outbursts, while the third, most dangerous type, uses violence as a conscious means of domination and control, often beyond the family context. Partner violence can also be classified by type: physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and increasingly present stalking. Physical and sexual violence are the most visible forms, but psychological and economic ones have equally destructive consequences, particularly for the victim's self-esteem, emotional stability, and economic independence (WHO, 2013). Economic violence is often the reason why victims remain in violent relationships — due to financial dependence on the perpetrator (EIGE, 2022). Johnson's typology (2008) distinguishes intimate terrorism (violence aimed at controlling the entire relationship), situational couple violence (reactive, episodic), and separation-instigated violence, which is particularly dangerous during the phase of emotional destabilization of the partner. Intimate terrorism is most often associated with male perpetrators and represents the most dangerous and persistent form, often with elements of femicide as the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence (Johnson, 2008).

The roots of gender-based violence lie in structural inequality and male dominance in most spheres of society. Gender roles, as social constructions, define what is considered "acceptable" for women and men, thus shaping perceptions of violence (Popadić, 2011). For violence to occur, three preconditions must be present: power, authority, and trust, components often inherent in intimate relationships (Popadić, 2011). Research shows that traditional gender roles, which support male dominance and female subordination, increase the risk of violence and the willingness to justify it. In contrast, egalitarian gender ideologies, which promote equality and reject stereotypes, are associated with lower levels of tolerance toward violence (Popadić, 2011). Gender roles affect not only the division of domestic and parental roles but also the perception of fairness and satisfaction within partnerships.

In this sense, deconstructing traditional gender roles and promoting authenticity and equality in partner relationships represent essential steps in preventing violence against women and in building a more just society.

Authenticity as a Protective Factor in Partner Relationships

The quality of intimate relationships is strongly influenced by mutual trust, emotional closeness, and equality. Research shows that high-quality relationships contribute to both partners' psychological and physical well-being (Kiecolt-Glaser and Wilson, 2017). According to social exchange theory, relationship stability stems from perceived benefits and mutual dependence (Cropanzano et al., 2016).

Authenticity, defined by Rogers (1961) as congruence between one's self and experience, is central to healthy relationships. Kernis and Goldman (2006) describe authenticity as a dynamic process involving self-awareness, openness, and behavior aligned with personal values. Authentic individuals are better equipped to express needs, set boundaries, and maintain emotional stability (Rogers, 1961; Seligman, 2002).

Rigid internalization of traditional gender roles can suppress authenticity, increasing vulnerability to control and manipulation (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Kernis and Goldman, 2006). Humanistic and social-psychological perspectives emphasize that authenticity evolves through social interaction and is vital in resisting external pressures (Lazarus, 1991; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Within intimate relationships, authenticity fosters mutual understanding and protects against gender-based inequality and violence (Brown, 2010; Gottman and Silver, 1999).

By encouraging self-expression over conformity, authenticity strengthens resilience to gender stereotypes and promotes relationships based on respect and equality. In this way, it can serve as a protective factor against destructive dynamics and support the development of healthier partnerships (Perel, 2006).

Understanding the interplay between authenticity, gender beliefs, and attitudes toward violence provides valuable insight into the socio-psychological mechanisms that sustain gender-based violence. This framework connects individual psychological processes with broader social norms, highlighting key points for intervention through education, psychosocial support, and cultural change.

Materials and Methods

The subject of this study concerns the examination of the relationship between gender roles, beliefs about intimate relationships, and attitudes toward violence against women. The primary objective of the research is to investigate the relationship between gender beliefs, authenticity in intimate relationships, and the tendency to justify family or gender-based violence against women. Special emphasis is placed on the role of gender-role beliefs in different domains of life as predictors of tolerance toward violence, as well as the potential significance of authenticity in intimate relationships as a protective psychological factor.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do respondents in Serbia tend to endorse traditional or egalitarian gender roles, and are there differences among groups defined by socio-demographic variables (gender, rural/urban residence, education, age)?
2. Is there a significant association between gender beliefs (traditional/egalitarian) across different domains, authenticity in intimate relationships, and justification of violence?
3. Can gender-role beliefs predict justification of violence in intimate relationships?
4. Does authenticity in intimate relationships moderate the relationship between gender-role beliefs and justification of violence, that is, does authenticity in partnerships act as a moderator between gender beliefs and justification of violence?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Respondents in Serbia will, on average, be more inclined toward traditional than egalitarian gender roles. Women, younger individuals, those with higher education, and urban residents will hold more egalitarian attitudes compared to men, older individuals, less educated participants, and rural residents. Serbia and the Western Balkans are characterized by long-standing patriarchal patterns that still shape gender roles and expectations (Browne et al., 2017; USAID, 2020). However, there is generational and educational differentiation: younger generations, women, and more highly educated respondents show a stronger tendency toward egalitarian attitudes, which aligns with the findings of Almeida et al. (2023), who note that demographic variables such as age and education significantly explain variability in attitudes toward violence and gender roles. Research in Serbia, particularly in rural contexts, indicates that traditional patterns and gender norms are among the key factors shaping attitudes about intimate relationships (Soković and Ranđelović., 2024).

H2: Traditional gender beliefs will be positively associated with justification of violence in intimate relationships. Egalitarian beliefs will be associated with greater authenticity in partnerships, while higher authenticity will be negatively associated with justification of violence. Traditional gender beliefs rest on an asymmetrical distribution of power in partnerships, which often normalizes control and violence (González and Rodríguez-Planas, 2021). Research in Serbia shows that acceptance of patriarchal patterns is strongly linked to greater risk of justifying and tolerating violence (Djikanović et al., 2010). By contrast, egalitarian beliefs promote equality and facilitate freer expression in partnerships, which enhances

the experience of authenticity in relationships (Almeida et al., 2023).

H3: Gender beliefs significantly predict justification of violence in intimate relationships, with traditional beliefs increasing and egalitarian beliefs decreasing justification. Gender socialization theory emphasizes that beliefs about the "proper" roles of men and women are key factors influencing attitudes toward the acceptability of violence (Gage, 2012). In the Serbian context, where patriarchal culture remains strong, traditional beliefs may facilitate justification of violence as a "disciplinary tool" (Soković and Ranđelović., 2024). Conversely, egalitarian beliefs encourage equality and non-violent conflict resolution, leading to lower justification of violence (Almeida et al., 2023).

H4: Authenticity in intimate relationships moderates the relationship between gender beliefs and justification of violence. The negative effect of traditional beliefs on justification of violence will be weaker among individuals with high authenticity. Authenticity entails the capacity for honest expression and consistency with one's values in intimate relationships. Research indicates that this aspect of relationships is linked to healthier emotional functioning and lower tolerance for aggressive behaviors (Miller et al., 2024). Thus, individuals with traditional beliefs who nevertheless highly value authenticity are more likely to reject justification of violence, as it would contradict their sense of personal integrity. Conversely, low levels of authenticity may amplify the negative impact of traditional beliefs (González and Rodríguez-Planas, 2021).

Variables and Instruments

Attitudes toward violence against women were operationalized using the *Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale* (DMVAS; Peters, 2003). The scale consists of 18 statements measuring the degree of agreement with misconceptions about domestic violence. It includes four dimensions: (a) victim character blame, (b) victim behavior blame, (c) excusing or justifying the perpetrator, and (d) minimizing the severity of violence. Respondents answer on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher total scores indicating greater tolerance and justification of violence.

Gender-role beliefs were measured using the *Gender Role Attitudes Scale* (Raboteć-Šarić, 2002). This instrument is an adaptation of the *Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale* (SRES; Rollero and De Piccoli, 2020) and was constructed to assess beliefs about gender equality across different spheres of social life. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The scale comprises five subscales: Parental role: equality in childcare, upbringing, and household responsibilities; Social-interpersonal-heterosexual role: gender expectations in social and intimate relationships, including partnership dynamics and interpersonal interaction; Professional role: beliefs about gender equality in employment and careers; Marital/partnership role: attitudes toward decision-making, financial responsibilities, and organization of family life; Educational role: beliefs about gender equality in education, including access, choice of studies, and career orientation. Scores on each subscale range from 16 to 80, with higher scores reflecting more egalitarian attitudes and lower scores reflecting more traditional attitudes.

Beliefs about intimate relationships were operationalized using the Serbian adaptation of the *Authenticity in Relationships Scale* (AIRS-22; Grljak, 2018), based on the original version developed by Lopez and Rice (2006). The scale includes 22 items across two subscales: *Unacceptance of Deception* and *Intimate Risk-Taking*, and has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties in the Serbian context. Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater authenticity. *Unacceptance of Deception* refers to authenticity through honesty, measuring the extent to which a person rejects lying or concealment in a relationship. *Intimate Risk-Taking* measures willingness to embrace psychological vulnerability and trust, including sharing deep thoughts and feelings even at the risk of misunderstanding or rejection.

Socio-demographic variables were collected through a short questionnaire, including gender (male/female), place of residence (urban/rural), age (in years) and education level (secondary school, college, university, master's degree, doctoral studies).

Sample and Research Procedure

The sample was convenient and consisted of 201 respondents, of whom 122 (60.7%) were female and 79 (39.3%) male. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 67 years, with a mean age of 37.8 years (SD = 10.10). Regarding residence, 149 participants (74.1%) were from urban areas and 52 (25.9%) from rural

areas. With respect to education, 58 participants (28.9%) completed secondary school, 27 (13.4%) higher vocational education, 59 (29.4%) university, 53 (26.4%) master's, and 4 (2%) doctoral studies.

The research was conducted online via *Google Forms* in December 2024, and the link was distributed through social media platforms.

Results

In this section, descriptive measures of the main research variables are first presented, followed by the results of the correlation analysis, the relationship between the main variables and socio-demographic variables through *t*-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients, and finally, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the main research variables*

Variables	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*Sk*	*Ku*	A
Attitudes toward violence against women	23	126	68,66	23,22	0,28	-0,51	,89
Interpersonal relations	1,38	5,00	3,97	0,76	-0,66	-0,19	,73
Educational role	1,57	5,00	4,14	0,83	-0,90	-0,05	,76
Professional role	1,44	5,00	4,32	0,73	-1,17	0,81	,82
Partner role	1,20	5,00	4,11	0,76	-0,98	0,77	,81
Parental role	2,15	5,00	4,21	0,73	-0,96	0,10	,85
Rejection of deception	12	108	75,38	-1,51	0,99	0,78	,86
Risk-taking	15	90	75,51	-1,36	1,45	0,52	,87

Note: Min – minimum; Max – maximum; M – mean; SD – standard deviation; Sk – skewness; Ku – kurtosis; α – Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency reliability)

The data in Table 1 show that all variables are normally distributed, as skewness and kurtosis values fall within the ±1.5 range, which some authors suggest as a criterion of normality (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013, as cited in Dinić, 2019). This satisfies the assumption of normality for applying parametric techniques, which were thus used in further analysis (Fajgelj, 2013).

Regarding attitudes toward partner violence, the average score (M = 68.66, SD = 23.22) indicates a medium level of acceptance/rejection of violence, with relatively high variability among respondents. Skewness (0.28) and kurtosis (-0.51) indicate an approximately normal distribution. Scale reliability was high (α = .89).

All domains of gender roles (interpersonal, educational, professional, partner, parental) had means above 4 on a five-point scale, indicating a tendency toward egalitarian attitudes. The highest egalitarianism was found in the professional role (M = 4.32; α = .82), and the lowest in interpersonal-heterosocial relations (M = 3.97; α = .73), though in all domains responses leaned toward egalitarian values. All subscales demonstrated good to very good internal reliability (α = .73–.85).

Regarding the rejection of deception in partner relations, the high mean score (M = 75.38) indicates that participants largely reject deception as a relational strategy. The distribution was skewed toward higher values, and reliability was high (α = .86). The intimacy risk-taking subscale also showed a high mean score (M = 75.51), indicating openness and honesty in relationships even at the risk of emotional hurt. The distribution was skewed toward higher values (Sk = –1.36), with high reliability (α = .87).

Further, in order to examine the relationships between the main research variables and socio-demographic variables (gender and place of residence), *t*-tests were first conducted, followed by Pearson correlation coefficients.

Table 2. *Gender differences in attitudes toward family violence, gender roles and authenticity in relationships*

Variable	*Gender*	*N*	*M*	*t*	*p*
Attitudes toward family violence	M	79	79.23	5.56	.000***
	F	122	61.83		
Interpersonal relations	M	79	3.44	-8.54	.000***
	F	122	4.31		
Educational role	M	79	3.56	-8.80	.000***
	F	122	4.53		
Professional role	M	79	3.81	-8.57	.000***
	F	122	4.66		
Partner role	M	79	3.50	-10.45	.000***
	F	122	4.51		
Parental role	M	79	3.81	-6.27	.000***
	F	122	4.47		
Rejection of deception	M	79	65.84	-5.09	.000***
	F	122	81.57		
Intimacy risk-taking	M	79	73.00	-1.89	.060
	F	122	77.15		

Note*: M = Men; F = Women; ***p < .001*

The results presented in Table 2 indicate significant gender differences in almost all examined variables. When it comes to attitudes toward family violence, men on average reported significantly higher acceptance of violence (M = 79.23) compared to women (M = 61.83), $t = 5.56$, $p < .001$. Women expressed more egalitarian gender role attitudes across all domains: interpersonal, educational, professional, partner, and parental, with statistically significant differences for each domain ($p < .001$). Regarding authenticity in partner relations, women scored significantly higher on the dimension of rejection of deception (M = 81.57) compared to men ($p < .001$). On the intimacy risk-taking dimension, women also scored slightly higher, but the difference was not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

Table 3. *Differences in attitudes toward family violence, gender roles and authenticity in relationships by place of residence (urban/rural)*

Variable	Place of residence	N	M	t	*p*
Attitudes toward family violence	Urban	149	63.63	-5.467	.000***
	Rural	52	83.10		
Interpersonal relations	Urban	149	4.14	5.588	.000***
	Rural	52	3.48		
Educational role	Urban	149	4.37	6.549	.000***
	Rural	52	3.50		
Professional role	Urban	149	4.49	4.792	.000***
	Rural	52	3.87		
Partner role	Urban	149	4.28	5.434	.000***
	Rural	52	3.63		
Parental role	Urban	149	4.39	5.351	.000***
	Rural	52	3.71		
Rejection of deception	Urban	149	80.85	5.609	.000***
	Rural	52	59.73		
Intimacy risk-taking	Urban	149	75.70	0.294	.769
	Rural	52	74.78		

Note: ***p < .001

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate statistically significant differences between urban and rural participants in most of the examined variables. Respondents from rural areas showed significantly higher acceptance of family violence compared to those from urban areas ($p < .001$). Conversely, participants from urban areas reported significantly more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles across all domains — interpersonal, educational, professional, partner, and parental ($p < .001$).On the dimension of rejection of deception within partner authenticity, urban respondents scored significantly higher than rural respondents ($p < .001$). On the intimacy risk-taking dimension, however, no significant difference was found ($p = .769$).

Table 4. *Correlations of attitudes toward family violence, gender roles and authenticity in relationships with age and educational status*

Variable	Age	Educational status
Attitudes toward violence	–.022	–.187**
Interpersonal relations	.067	.136
Educational role	.083	.139*
Professional role	. 048	.038
Partner role	.108	.136
Parental role	.049	.116
Rejection of deception	–.028	.139*
Intimacy risk-taking	–.039	–.190**

Note: $p < .05$*, **$p < .01$

As shown in Table 4, age was not significantly related to most of the variables, suggesting that participants' age is not a relevant factor in shaping attitudes toward gender roles, authenticity in partner relationships, or attitudes toward domestic violence.

Educational status, on the other hand, showed moderate positive correlations: individuals with higher education valued egalitarianism more strongly in interpersonal relations (r = .136), educational role (r = .139), parental role (r = .116), as well as in the dimension of rejection of deception (r = .139). At the same time, higher education was associated with lower scores on the intimacy risk-taking scale (r = –.190**).

Table 5. Correlations between attitudes toward violence, gender role dimensions, and authenticity

Variable	Attitudes toward violence
Interpersonal relations	–.538**
Educational role	–.611**
Professional role	–.418**
Partner role	–.548**
Parental role	–.493**
Rejection of deception	–.572**
Intimacy risk-taking	.120

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The results in Table 5 show that attitudes toward violence were strongly and negatively correlated with egalitarian beliefs across all gender role domains (interpersonal, educational, professional, partner, parental), as well as with rejection of deception. All these correlations were statistically significant at $p < .01$. This means that greater acceptance of violence is associated with lower valuation of egalitarian gender roles and greater tolerance for deception in partner relationships.

On the other hand, attitudes toward violence were not significantly correlated with intimacy risk-taking (r = .12, ns).

Table 6. *Multiple regression analysis for predictors of Attitudes toward family violence, Based on Socio-Demographic Characteristics, Gender Role Beliefs, and Authenticity in Partner Relationships (n = 201)*

Predictors	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	*Model 4 β*
Age	.056	.045	.042	.034
Educational status	–.136*	–.117*	–.113*	–.113*
Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)	.245**	–.040	–.037	–.045
Place of residence (0 = urban; 1 = rural)	–.272**	–.113	–.107	–.107
Interpersonal role	—	–.142	–.150	–.172
Educational role	—	–.448***	–.415***	–.367**
Professional role	—	.139	.158	.132
Partner role	—	–.117	–.118	–.144
Parental role	—	–.042	–.040	–.021
Authenticity (total score)	—	—	–.074	–.050
Interactions (roles × authenticity)	—	—	—	–.019 to .181
R^2	.22	.42	.42	.44
F	13.53***	15.20***	13.81***	9.61***

Note: $p < .05$, *$p < .01$, **$p < .001$

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine predictors of attitudes toward family violence- In the first step (Model 1), among socio-demographic variables, significant predictors were educational status (β = –.136, $p < .05$), gender (β = .245, $p < .01$), and place of residence (β = –.272, $p < .001$). Higher educational status, female gender, and urban residence were associated with less tolerant attitudes toward violence. Age did not show a significant effect.

In the second step (Model 2), gender role beliefs were added, which significantly increased explained variance. The strongest predictor was egalitarian beliefs in the educational role domain (β = –.448, $p < .001$). Attitudes in other role domains (interpersonal, professional, partner, parental) were not significant. In this model, the effect of gender was no longer significant, while educational status remained a marginal predictor (β = –.117, $p < .05$).

In the third step (Model 3), the overall authenticity scale was introduced, but its contribution was not significant (β = –.074, ns). The effect of egalitarian educational role beliefs remained strong and stable (β = –.415, $p < .001$).

In the final step (Model 4), interactions between authenticity and each subscale of egalitarian gender roles were included, but none were significant. Egalitarianism in the educational role domain remained the only consistent and strong predictor (β = –.367, $p < .01$), while educational status was marginally significant (β = –.113, $p = .050$).

Valuing equality in educational opportunities was the most important factor associated with rejection of family violence, even when controlling for demographic characteristics and authenticity in partner relationships. Studies on gender roles and intimate relationships (e.g., García-Díaz et al., 2020; Dinić, 2019) indicate that rigid gender norms predict higher tolerance of violence. Given that authenticity entails balance and open communication, a negative association with traditional gender roles can therefore be expected. Authenticity, although theoretically relevant, did not emerge as a significant predictor nor as a moderator between gender roles and attitudes toward violence.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that the justification of intimate partner violence is at a medium level, with high variability among participants. This result points to the existence of significant individual differences in tolerance toward violence, which is consistent with previous studies showing that acceptance of domestic violence myths varies depending on sociodemographic factors, cultural contexts, and gender beliefs (Peters, 2008, Gracia and Tomás, 2014). The medium level of tolerance observed in our

sample may be interpreted as a reflection of the ambivalent social context in Serbia, where traditional patriarchal patterns intersect with contemporary values of gender equality (Blagojević, 2013).

Gender differences emerged as one of the most consistent findings: men reported higher levels of violence acceptance and more traditional gender role beliefs, while women expressed stronger support for egalitarianism. These results can be explained through social role theory (Eagly, 1987), according to which men and women are socialized into different value systems. Women, who have historically been more frequently exposed to discrimination and violence, develop greater sensitivity to gender inequality and lower tolerance for violence (Flood and Pease, 2009). Similar results have been obtained in European research, where men systematically show a greater tendency to justify violence and endorse domestic violence myths (Gracia and Herrero, 2006).

In this study, women scored higher across all domains of gender role egalitarianism, which is in line with the findings of Raboteg-Šarić (2002) and Vinagre González et al. (2023), who reported that women internalize expectations involving support for equality in both family and public life. This result may also be related to the fact that egalitarian gender ideologies provide women with a direct protective effect against violence and discrimination (Waltermaurer, 2012).

Differences between urban and rural respondents revealed that participants from rural areas displayed higher tolerance toward violence and more traditional attitudes toward gender roles. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that more traditional cultural contexts, as often found in rural areas, support patriarchal norms legitimizing male dominance and control (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Kandiyoti, 1988). In contrast, urban participants, exposed to modernization processes and global values of equality, expressed more egalitarian attitudes and lower tolerance toward violence, which aligns with findings from other post-socialist countries (Krizsán and Popa, 2014).

Although authenticity in intimate relationships was highly valued in the sample, the results show that it was not significantly associated with attitudes toward justifying violence. This is noteworthy, as theoretical models suggest that authenticity, understood as consistency with oneself and honesty in relationships (Lopez and Rice, 2006; Kernis and Goldman, 2006), contributes to health and stability in intimate partnerships. A possible explanation lies in the fact that attitudes toward violence have a strong social-normative dimension, and are therefore primarily determined by cultural values and educational context rather than intrapsychic factors (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, authenticity may be more relevant for the quality of specific intimate relationships, but not necessarily for general attitudes toward violence.

Educational status emerged as a relevant factor: higher levels of education were associated with greater egalitarianism across all domains of gender roles and lower acceptance of violence. These findings align with studies showing that education acts as a protective factor by fostering critical thinking and adoption of equality values (Waltermaurer, 2012; World Health Organization, 2021). Age, however, was not significantly related to the variables under study, suggesting that generational differences are not decisive, and that education and sociocultural context play a more dominant role (Gracia and Herrero, 2006).

Strong negative correlations between acceptance of violence and egalitarian gender roles confirm theoretical assumptions that patriarchal gender ideologies are key factors sustaining tolerance for violence (Heise, 1998; Flood and Pease, 2009). Similarly, the association between lower rejection of deception and higher acceptance of violence suggests that individuals who tolerate manipulation and inauthenticity in relationships may be more prone to relativizing violence. On the other hand, the dimension of intimate risk-taking was not significantly related to attitudes toward violence, which may indicate that this aspect of authenticity is more linked to individual intimacy style than to value systems.

Hierarchical regression analysis provided deeper insights into the factors shaping attitudes toward domestic violence. In the first model, among sociodemographic variables, significant predictors were educational status, gender, and place of residence. Higher educational status, female gender, and urban residence were associated with lower levels of violence tolerance. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that education plays a protective role against violence tolerance by promoting critical thinking and egalitarian values (Waltermaurer, 2012; Flood, 2015). Furthermore, research consistently shows that men justify violence more often than women (Flood and Pease, 2009; Gracia and Herrero, 2006), while urban contexts, due to greater exposure to modernization processes and global equality values, foster lower tolerance for violence compared to rural settings (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

When beliefs about gender roles were added in the second model, the explained variance significantly increased, with educational role egalitarianism emerging as the strongest predictor of lower

violence acceptance. This result confirms that not all domains of egalitarian beliefs are equally relevant, but that the educational context represents a key space for internalizing values that counteract violence justification. From a social constructionist perspective (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), education is not only an institution for knowledge transmission but also a mechanism through which social norms are formed. It is therefore understandable that educational egalitarianism, as an indicator of a broader belief system of equality, has the strongest predictive significance.

The introduction of authenticity in the third step did not show a significant contribution, indicating that individual intrapsychic characteristics do not play a decisive role in shaping general attitudes toward violence. This can be interpreted within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), according to which attitudes are more strongly shaped by social norms and contextual expectations than by personal traits. Although authenticity is relevant for the quality of specific intimate relationships (Kernis and Goldman, 2006; Lopez and Rice, 2006), its influence on global attitudes toward violence appears to be mediated by cultural factors.

In the final model, introducing interactions between authenticity and gender egalitarianism subscales did not yield significant effects, suggesting that authenticity does not moderate the relationship between gender roles and attitudes toward violence. In this model, educational role egalitarianism remained the only stable and strong predictor, while educational status was at the threshold of statistical significance. This suggests that education has a dual role: it directly influences attitudes toward violence, but even more strongly through shaping egalitarian beliefs in the educational domain.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that support for gender equality in the educational domain is the strongest predictor of attitudes toward domestic violence, underscoring the educational system's crucial role in violence prevention. Promoting egalitarian values through formal education and targeted programs can significantly reduce tolerance for violence.

Attitudes toward domestic violence are not merely individual but reflect broader cultural and social structures. Gender and urban-rural differences were evident, with women and urban participants showing higher rejection of violence and stronger egalitarian beliefs. Although authenticity in intimate relationships is theoretically relevant, it did not emerge as a significant predictor in this study, suggesting that educational and cultural factors play a more prominent role.

These results highlight the importance of integrating gender-sensitive education policies and tailored interventions, especially in rural areas where patriarchal norms remain influential. However, the study has limitations: a convenience sample, gender and urban bias, and reliance on self-reported measures may affect the generalizability of findings. Future research should use more representative samples, combine methods, and explore how educational and cultural contexts influence attitudes toward violence. Such efforts can support the development of effective, evidence-based prevention strategies.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Formal approval from an ethics committee was not required for this study. However, all participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research and provided their voluntary, anonymous, and informed consent in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Author Contributions

Olivera Radović: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft. Zvezdan Arsić: Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization. Dragana Stanojević: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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